

This chapter argues that expert practice is an inquiry which surfaces a hermeneutic relationship between theory, practice, and the world, with implications for new lines of questioning in the Decoding interview.

## **Decoding the Disciplines as a Hermeneutic Practice**

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Insight is more than the knowledge of this or that situation. It always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive. Thus insight always involves an element of self-knowledge and constitutes a necessary side of what we called experience in the proper sense. Insight is something we come to. (Gadamer 1999, 356)

### **Introduction**

Decoding the disciplines is an approach with fundamentally cognitivist assumptions.

Bottlenecks, which are areas of the discipline where students can get ‘stuck’ or ‘interrupted’ in their learning (Middendorf and Pace 2004; 4-5), are typically described in conceptual terms, and the Decoding process was originally designed to help experts unpack their own cognitive processes. Using the Decoding interview technique (Pace and Middendorf 2004), experts are guided to unpack troublesome areas for students, working through how they approach and ‘think through’ such difficulties as experts. However, in our interviews of seven faculty members from four diverse disciplines as described in Chapter 2 of this issue (Miller-Young and Boman), we observed that many of the bottlenecks described had more to do with ways of being-in-the-world, having affective, relational, and identity elements. As others have argued for SoTL more broadly (Poole 2013; Miller-Young and Yeo 2015), we suggest that taking an interpretive rather than a strictly cognitive approach (as shown through several, if not all of the other chapters in this special issue) would enrich the possibilities inherent in Decoding work. In this analysis, a

hermeneutic approach is undertaken as a lens with which to unpack disciplinary elements related to openness to questions, the interpretation of experience, the nature of knowledge, our relationship to language and text, and being-in-the-world. A hermeneutic philosophy has much to say about all of these elements we found present in the interviews, and thus a hermeneutic reading can help to enrich our understanding of the Decoding process.

## **Hermeneutics**

It will not be possible within the scope of this chapter to outline the whole of hermeneutics.

However, there are certain key elements which I will highlight in order to set the stage for the analysis. The approach taken for this analysis is to focus on the aspects of the interviews which surfaced powerful hermeneutic elements.

Hermeneutics, at its heart, is about interpretation. It argues for the “basic interpretability of life itself” (Smith 1991, 199). Interpretive methodologies recognize our own situatedness within the topic of the inquiry, a kind of inhabitation of the questions. This idea becomes relevant to this set of interviews, because each demonstrates a living into the discipline through deeply tacit knowledge. The interview itself becomes a disruption to the tacit, where the familiar becomes strange. Mayers (2001) writes of hermeneutics, “understanding and interpretation come from a tension that lives in between what is familiar to us and what is unfamiliar” (6).

Hermeneutics is a tradition with a long history, usually traced beginning with Schleiermacher, Husserl, and further developed through the work of Heidegger and Gadamer. It is largely a Gadamerian conception of hermeneutics which I will draw from for the purposes of this analysis. Moran (2002) describes Gadamer’s approach thus:

Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation or understanding, and, for Gadamer, always signifies an ongoing, never completable process of understanding, rooted in human

finitude and human linguisticity. Gadamer follows Heidegger's *Being and Time* in seeing understanding as the central manner of human being-in-the-world. Humans are essentially involved in the historically situated and finite task of understanding the world, a world encountered and inhabited in and through language.... Philosophy, then, is a conversation leading towards mutual understanding, a conversation, furthermore, where this very understanding comes as something genuinely experienced. (248-9)

Gadamer (1999) sees this experience of understanding as a profoundly linguistic event, with the relationship between texts (broadly defined) and our lives, and additionally, between the old and what is new. Not only does the text have something to say about the decision we make today or the way we read or understand a situation, but this new situation then helps us recast the past and see the text anew. Gadamer writes, "so also it is universally true of texts that only in the process of understanding them is the dead trace of meaning transformed back into living meaning" (164). This is known as the 'hermeneutic circle.' Thus, a particular understanding of experience is invoked. Experience becomes interpretable and a way of making meaning.

In the following, I explore the hermeneutic conceptions of openness to questions, the relationship to text, and the nature of knowledge and experience. The Decoding interview itself can be read as a hermeneutic task, as the interviewer attempts to achieve deep understanding of the discipline through the play of question and answer. Gadamer (1999) in describing dialogue, might indeed have been speaking of the Decoding process:

To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence it is an art of testing. But the art of testing is the art of questioning. For

we have seen that to question means to lay open, to place in the open. As against the fixity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid (367).

Gadamer argues that questioning “is more a passion than an action. A question presses itself on us, we can no longer avoid it and persist in our accustomed opinion” (366). As a result of the dialogic process of analyzing the Decoding interviews, what follows is a surfacing of the hermeneutic concepts deeply present in the interviewees’ descriptions of their work within their disciplines, revealing hermeneutic structures within the disciplines themselves.

### **Openness to Questions**

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. (Rilke 1993, Letter Four)

Gadamer (1999) demonstrates a particular orientation to ideas, framed as questions that “breach” or break open a conversation in a new way. He writes:

Such ideas do not occur to us entirely unexpectedly. They always presuppose an orientation toward an area of openness from which the idea can occur – i.e. they presuppose questions. The real nature of the sudden idea is perhaps less that a solution occurs to us like an answer to a riddle than that a question occurs to us that breaks through into the open and thereby makes an answer possible. Hence we say that a question too ‘occurs’ to us, that it ‘arises’ or ‘presents itself’ more than that we raise it or present it. (366)

Such an orientation was present most strikingly in Bonnie’s interview. Bonnie described how stories address an experienced journalist. In a way that echoes Gadamer, she talks about the way in which a good story creates a breach, how it “breaks through into the open and thereby makes an answer possible” (Gadamer 1999, 366). She told us, “[*It is*] those unexplored angles

*and when you pull them up to the surface they are typically like, tension laden. Tension laden.”*

When asked how she knows when something exhibits tension, she explained,

*Well I guess I identify tension... by being able to recognize discord, disharmony; I identify tension by what it is that I feel in response to the idea.... Like when there is a good idea and there is tension I emotionally engage with that idea, as a producer, as a faculty member, as a journalist I can just emotionally engage with that idea quickly.*

Interviewer: And what does that engagement look like?

[Pause]... *I don't know!... well I mean on a first level it is just excitement, I am excited by the idea. I am kind of excited by the notion of, "A-ha! There is something here we are going to bring out, that we are going to surface that has never potentially not been surfaced before," so that idea, the big reveal.*

A central tenet of Gadamer's hermeneutics is dialogic, but dialogic for the purposes of coming to understanding. In his analysis of the earlier philosophy of Schleiermacher Gadamer (1999) comments, "The 'method' of understanding will be concerned equally with what is common, by comparison, and with what is unique, by intuition" (190). An intuitive sense of what is unique, and therefore, a story worth telling, is what Bonnie has developed as an experienced journalist. In part, this is done by maintaining her natural curiosity, combined with continuous and astute consumption of media.

Bonnie speaks of the importance of being friendly to ideas, almost as though she is engaging in a dialogic process with the story itself. She explained:

*I am really friendly with all my story ideas like I just really respect them... and think yeah, this could be, this could be, and then when I am in a story meeting I do enough preliminary research to kind of back my claim of a story idea with at least some evidence*

*so that by the time it gets to the story idea nobody rejects it... things don't pop in my head that I immediately reject as stupid or not worth pursuing.*

This echoes Gadamer's notion that at the heart of hermeneutic dialogue is the possibility that the other person might be right. In this case, it is the story itself which emerges and has the potential to teach us something.

Bonnie's interview also contained sensitivity to generativity, complexity, and resisting the reduction of narratives to simple binaries, all inherently hermeneutic. A sense of openness to questions is also seen in Colin's interview when he used exactly the same phrase as Bonnie, when speaking about how he approaches scripts, he said: "*I have to keep myself open to what else could be.*" His discipline is theatre, and his perspective slips between director, teacher, and consultant in the business community on creativity and play. It is his interview I will now explore more fully.

### **Relationship to text**

The hermeneutic consciousness seeks to confront that will with something of the truth of remembrance: with what is still and ever again real. (Gadamer 1999, xxxviii)

Colin's interview beautifully laid out a hermeneutic understanding of the relationship to text. He told us in his interview that he reads a script fifty or sixty times before starting rehearsal, and while the text itself is necessarily static on the page there is always the possibility of discovering something new:

*What usually happens is that... I will start reading it... I do it not because I want to, or because I enjoy it but because I know I have to. I will start reading through it and it will just be like I am going through the same story again and it tells me something, but then all of a sudden I will notice something in this story or script, or a character and their*

*relationship to another character that had never before been apparent or had caught my attention, and so that one piece of information can sometimes be a key to an entire scene. I am always amazed, like, “How could I have read it that so many times and never get that?”*

We thus can see how our reading of, interpretation, and experience of a text then becomes dynamic rather than static. The text itself has not changed, but with a deep inhabitation of fifty readings, we discover something new, which then changes our understanding of the text as a whole and how we live into it. Gadamer (1999) writes, “A written tradition, once deciphered and read, is to such an extent pure mind that it speaks to us as if in the present. That is why the capacity to read, to understand what is written, is like a secret art, even a magic that frees and binds us” (163). This capacity for the creation of something living out of static text is deeply woven into the performing arts. Indeed, Gadamer uses the notion of performance, whether of theatre or ritual, to explain the hermeneutic circle:

From its inception – whether instituted in a single act or introduced gradually – the nature of a festival is to be celebrated regularly. Thus its own original essence is always to be something different (even when celebrated in exactly the same way). An entity that exists only by always being something different is temporal in a more radical sense than everything that belongs to history. It has its being only in becoming and return. (123)

Colin describes a kind of intersubjective inhabitation he engages in with the actors.

*So in rehearsals you would start to then see what happens, like as you bring the actor closer to the information you see what happens when people are actually moving within a physical environment that resembles the place in which they occupy, and then bringing into play their imagination, bringing to mind sense, experience and memory and seeing*

*what sense, experience and memory comes as you move inside of this physical place,  
given this information and moving it towards you.... Space holds memory.*

Colin here echoes Gadamer (1999), when he notes, “Play is more than the consciousness of the player, and so it is more than a subjective act. Language is more than the consciousness of the speaker; so also it is more than a subjective act” (xxxvi). Juan Carlos, in Journalism, spoke to the notion that we are “always already” in the world, and that language is indeed part of our ways of knowing. He explained:

*The problem is that objectivity in any pure sense, in any sense of mimicking reality is impossible for any number of reasons. The first is that journalists are already, in some situation, or some situatedness and they can't escape that, and also language, which as a social construct cannot mimic reality.*

Or in Gadamer's (1999) terms, “The conceptual world in which philosophizing develops has already captivated us in the same way that the language in which we live conditions us” (xxv).

Gadamer further explains his interest, “My real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing” (xxviii).

There is a deep sense in which all three of the participants raised thus far, Bonnie, Colin, and Juan Carlos, are interested similarly in having their students delve into the depths of what happens to us “over and above our wanting and doing.” They don't want their students to become objective – all three of these participants do not believe in an objective stance, but rather, they desire their students to step back from the constructed narratives to deeper questions of interpretation and meaning. As Colin expressed, “*There is a line in theatre which is, 'Character is situation,' and in a way who you are exists only in relation to other things and we don't exist outside of anything.*”



The act of hermeneutic interpretation, then, begins to hold an ethical dimension.

Monique, in Nursing, brings forward a final example of how the interpretation of a text must become a living interpretation with an ethical dimension; she describes a bottleneck *“surrounding this idea of a document – which is the code of ethics we have in nursing – in relation to how students actually understand it in their practice.”* She goes on to explore the difficulty of living the code of ethics in practice, the complexity of the dilemmas nurses face that challenge their own pre-understandings (in Gadamerian terms). She explained, *“I am expecting them to really live the code of ethics, I guess... I am, and maybe that is too much to expect.”*

When probed by the interviewer what that might look like, she clarified, *“That would like actually looking at the dilemma they are faced with and actually looking at different sides of it... so more than just being respectful.”* She wanted them not to just make a judgment, but to actually place themselves in another’s shoes with a deep kind of empathy, back to Gadamer’s (1999) notion of understanding “as something genuinely *experienced*” (249). This experience is a kind of opening to the world and to the other: “the way we experience one another, the way we experience historical traditions, the way we experience the natural givenness of our existence and of our world, constitute a truly hermeneutic universe, in which we are not imprisoned, as if behind insurmountable barriers, but to which we are opened” (xxiv).

### **Relationship to knowledge and experience**

The hermeneutic phenomenon is basically not a problem of method at all. It is not concerned with a method of understanding by means of which texts are subjected to scientific investigation like all other objects of experience. It is not concerned primarily with amassing verified knowledge, such as would satisfy the methodological ideal of science – yet it too is concerned with knowledge and with truth. In understanding

tradition not only are texts understood, but insights are acquired and truths known. But what kind of knowledge and what kind of truth? (Gadamer 1999, xxi)

Questions of knowledge and truth were part of each interview in different ways. Juan Carlos expresses the relationship of journalism to truth in a way that directly echoes Gadamer's perspective: "*They practice journalism as though there is, as though there is a real world out there they can represent hermetically, that they can in language and in their stories capture 'the real' or 'the truth'.*" The interviews demonstrate a strikingly hermeneutic expression of the expert's relationship to knowledge, which is a dynamic to-and-fro between whole and part, provisionality, and theory-to-practice.

**Relationship of whole and part.** Five of the interviews explored directly the relationship of whole and part, or as framed in Chapter 2 of this issue, deconstructing and reconstructing (Miller-Young and Boman). This chapter further explores three interviews using a hermeneutic lens. Gadamer (1999) explains that hermeneutics in his view expands beyond interpreting texts only in relation to itself, instead, with Dilthey it was liberated: "The old interpretive principle of understanding the part in terms of the whole was no longer bound and limited to the dogmatic unity of the canon; it was concerned with the totality of the historical reality to which each individual historical document belonged" (177).

In Colin's descriptions of how he works with a script, he remarked on how he attends to multiple pieces that ultimately feed into the whole. He described, "*there are ways in which I highlight the script and particular pieces of information – types of information – and things that are about, you know, indications of time, indications of space, indications of the psychological make-up.*" This ultimately feeds into the whole, but that whole is influenced not just by what is in the script and his interpretation, but the gestalt of the dynamic between himself, the actors, the

script, and the space. He explained how the novice finds this more difficult: *“It is actually quite easy to show people how to take something apart; it is more difficult for them to understand, or then grasp after they have pulled something apart that it then all relates back together, because they become so interested in each piece individually.”* Similarly, Louisa in Nursing described thinking about illness on multiple levels of complexity simultaneously: cellular, tissue, organ, and organ system level. She explained,

*When you are thinking about all the different modalities and how we look at different ways of approaching an alteration in health and we want everything to build on each other and so you don't willy-nilly choose a treatment, you want the treatments to build on each other and have sort of a synergistic effect... you want to think about the person on an organ level, but you also have to think about the many things that could be causing what you see in a patient in terms of signs and symptoms, and that might mean you need to address it in more than one way.*

In a second scientific example, in Patricia's interview from the field of Engineering the relationship of part to whole was specifically explored. She explained how when thinking about a dynamic physics problem:

*The idea of free body in physics or engineering is we would take the object that we are analyzing and separate it out from all of its contexts so we can just look at the one object. But to make that free body an equivalent body to what it is in context we replace everything else with forces... The idea of making them draw this is to help them remember that no, the tension isn't equal to the weight anymore because we have this thing on the other side that is affecting the forces, but they always seem to revert back...*

*The more complex the problem they just skip over that step and just don't seem to remember to do it.*

When asked later if she herself visualizes the whole, she explains, “*I guess I don't try to visualize the system first because I know the more complex it is you can't just actually look at it and necessarily figure it out, and that is why it is important to look at all the pieces.*” Inherent in Patricia's exploration was a sense that the whole was greater than the sum of the parts. One had to understand the *context*, i.e. that the problem was situated as a dynamic system, rather than a static one. This then changes the “rules” of how they were to interpret the problem.

**Provisionality.** Important in Patricia's descriptions, as explored in Chapter 2 is the expert's ability to defer judgment, or what Miller-Young and Boman call valuing provisionality. Patricia explained,

*Generally my first step would be to get a sense of well, this one is heavier so it is probably going to move down, but it also depends on a lot of complicated things that are happening over here, so I don't usually try to figure that out in advance. I try to, you know, break it down into the simple parts and look at each simple part by itself and then put it back together. When these systems get more complicated you can't actually tell just from looking at it which way it is moving.*

For Gadamer, this provisionality comes into play when interpreting texts, but it has its reflection in the interviews by expert practitioners who have learned to ‘hold back’ their own prejudices or presuppositions until they have gathered enough information. In Patricia's example, she knows she can't ‘tell’ from just ‘looking’ at the problem, instead she has to draw it out and let the example speak for itself. Gadamer (1999) explains this kind of process (in relation to text) thus:

A thing does not present itself to the hermeneutical experience without an effort special to it, namely that of 'being negative toward itself.' A person who is trying to understand a text has to keep something at a distance – namely everything that suggests itself, on the basis of his own prejudices, as the meaning expected... Explicating the whole of meaning towards which understanding is directed forces us to make interpretive conjectures and to take them back again. The self-cancellation of the interpretation makes it possible for the thing itself – the meaning of the text – to assert itself. (465)

Colin explores this provisional nature of what he terms 'the supertask' in his work with actors, which is their 'big picture' goal: "*When I work with actors, even when we come to the super-task it is sort of a provisional super-task; it is given everything we know, this is really what it looks like, and then as we keep on working we may have to revise that.*" Patricia speaks of not jumping to conclusions when solving complex problems: "*You have a system of equations you have to solve for the unknown, and the tension in this case might be the unknown, and you just... you can't jump to that conclusion.*" She also noted that in engineering, "*expert designers spend more time on the brainstorming stage thinking of lots of possibilities and evaluating those possibilities before they start developing an actual solution, whereas the novice ones, they get one idea and they go with it and are done.*" Monique talks about the danger of making assumptions in nursing practice, and the importance of withholding judgments based on pre-determined categories:

*It is more about troubling our assumptions... this is more about giving someone, every person, the benefit of not making assumptions about those people. So when we are questioning assumptions we still do it in a respectful way which still aligns with the code of ethics... It is not just about respect... it is a capacity to think critically, with respect,*

*with a broader view... just a better understanding that I may not know, I maybe cannot possibly know in the situation how it is going to be, so how do I come in with an open view of this person.*

Monique describes how openness and non-judgment are in a paradoxical relation with the necessity of making decisions, which Gadamer would refer to as practical judgment, in Aristotle's terms *phronesis*. It echoes precisely Monique's wish that students learn not to apply the code of ethics in a mechanical way, but rather internalize it while simultaneously always being open to the person standing in front of them. Gadamer (1999) explains:

The question here, then, is not about knowledge in general but its concretion at a particular moment... we discover that the person who is understanding does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected but rather he thinks along with the other from the perspective of a specific bond of belonging, as if he too were affected. (323)

At the same time, while engaging in this deep form of empathy, one holds open the possibility that we do not really understand, especially in advance, just as Monique describes above. Gadamer claims, "By understanding the other, by claiming to know him, one robs his claims of their legitimacy. In particular, the dialectic of charitable or welfare work operates in this way, penetrating all relationships... as a reflective form of the effort to dominate" (360).

The notion of *phronesis*, of the practical judgment of what to do in this or that situation, leads naturally to the question of the relationship of theory and practice.

**Theory to practice.** The relationship of theory and practice surfaces most clearly in two of the nursing interviews, Louisa and Wendy's. Louisa told us of the perennial problem in

professional education, the disconnect of what is learned in the classroom with the students' connection of it to the world of practice:

*In this class I want the students to be able to take all the information they know around the pathophysiological process and how that manifests, in order to be able to think, "What do I need to know?" Because if they don't have an understanding of those processes, the treatment that they decide, or how they decide to go about working with their patients might not be effective, right?... Often times students are in the dark about that because they don't have the experience to feed back on, "Well what is the point?" whereas nurses working in the field have this, "Well I see it every day, and I know... like I took care of a patient."*

This tension is an inevitable element of the educative process, particularly in professional education. It surfaced in all of the interviews: in journalism, in theatre, in engineering, and prominently in the nursing interviews. As Gadamer explains (1999), this kind of practical knowledge demonstrates phronesis:

The old Aristotelian distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge is operative here – a distinction which cannot be reduced to that between the true and the probable. Practical knowledge, phronesis, is another kind of knowledge. Primarily, this means that it is directed towards the concrete situation. Thus it must grasp the "circumstances" in their infinite variety. (21)

The enormous complexity that Gadamer speaks of, the "infinite variety" was especially prominent in Louisa's interview. She described a process, in diagnosis and treatment, of thinking about simultaneous levels of function in the body (cellular, tissue, organ, system) and how she would cross-reference that with social factors, using the expression "*a constellation of*

*symptoms.*” Later in her interview she described how experience with this kind of complexity, over time, would lead to a kind of ‘intuition’ about a patient and what would happen next. As Gadamer (1999) writes, “experience teaches us to acknowledge the real” (357). Louisa also spoke in a compelling way about gathering more information, hearkening back to the idea of provisionality, and the idea that some information becomes ‘foreground’ and other information, ‘background.’

*A lot of it is being observant and being able to say, “Ah, what else do I want to know?” I think that has really helped me in terms of understanding and gathering all the information that I need to because then you are able to prioritize and know what is foreground, know what is background... inquire a little further around any associated symptoms a patient might be having around that.*

Thus, expert practice is fundamentally an inquiry, fundamentally a hermeneutic relationship between the text, the ‘normal’ of the body, and the infinite variety and messiness of this or that patient as presented.

Wendy, also in nursing, spoke of the importance of context:

*So for me nursing is focusing on the individual’s needs, or it could be a family, it could be the community, it could be the population, because I have worked in all those areas. So I am working collaboratively, it is not my agenda, and it is working with them to find out what their agenda is and what their issues are, but it is to also consider the broader influences that have brought them to this place; so what was happening in their family of origin? What was happening in their childhood? What is happening in their environment? What is happening in their work setting? What is happening in their family*



*support? What is happening with how they have learned to cope and their coping style and their ways of dealing with things.*

A hermeneutic understanding of the world is one in which context is paramount; where a sense of historicity is integral to interpreting experience and life itself. It is not the case that one can put aside one's prejudices, rather, a hermeneutic consciousness comes to a mature awareness of their extent and their situatedness: "a person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light" (Gadamer 1999, 360-1). This then is a simultaneous recognition of one's own context, and how it predisposes one to perceive others. This idea relates back to the notion of provisionality: the experienced expert has learned to "hold back" their own pre-judgments, but first, to be aware of them. This process is not one of eliminating historicity, but rather, as Gadamer suggests, "in human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the Thou truly as a thou – ie., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs" (361).

### **Implications**

A hermeneutic approach to Decoding the Disciplines, then, has implications both for the interviewing practice of Decoding as well as for educators in the classroom. A dialogic approach to the interviews, where the interviewer opens a space for the expert to descriptively explore and express their understandings, as Gadamer (1999) says, "to really say something to us" (361) is paramount. This approach then requires the interviewer to put aside their own preconceptions and the "historicity" of their own discipline. Further, it can suggest certain avenues of questioning if a dead end is reached with cognitively framed questions, or with bottlenecks that have more to do with ways of being-in-the-world. In cases where the bottleneck has to do with a living understanding of text, for example, in our interviews where Colin describes the

relationship with the script, or Monique explores the code of ethics, questions might be asked to further surface this relationship. Decoders might ask interviewees for living examples of how they interpret the texts they work with. As a possibility, Monique might have been asked for a specific instance of how the code of ethics manifested in her practice in a way that required critical thinking rather than mechanical implementation. Questions might also be asked to surface elements such as the experts' orientation to questions, their sense of play in their discipline, provisionality, or the historical context of their discipline.

For educators in the classroom, a hermeneutic understanding of discipline expands the repertoire far beyond information sharing. It begins to ask the teacher to conceptualize teaching within a broader framework of teaching within a discipline as communicating an epistemology and an ontology – ways of seeing, knowing, and practicing. It is not just the information itself, but rather, the information contextualized within the discipline's historically steeped relationship to the world. A hermeneutic approach also asks that educators enter into a dialogic relationship with students, and just as above in the Decoding process, asks that we not “overlook the claim” (Gadamer 1999, 361) students are making in their novice understandings of the discipline. It means that we are not only focused solely on making it easier for students to understand us as teachers or to decode the content. Rather, it means that we are simultaneously focused on understanding the students better and how they are experiencing the discipline. It asks us to more deeply inquire into the nature of student confusion in a generous way, rather than merely with a view to a quick fix. It requires, in Gadamerian terms, a kind of “fundamental openness” (361). This kind of openness is, at its best, at the heart of the pedagogical relationship.

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